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Homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Friday December 24, 1943

Subject: "CHRISTMAS DINNER IN UNIFORM" Information from U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps and food distribution officials of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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There'll be empty places around many a Christmas dinner table tomorrow... empty, because, this Christmas a husband or sister or son is in uniform far from home. As you sing the old familiar carols, and exchange gaily-wrapped gifts, your heart may be sad...you'll wonder how your serviceman or woman is spending the holiday.

Well, here's one thing you can be sure of. The men and women in uniform are having a holiday dinner as nearly like home as the Quartermaster Corps and War Food Administration can make it. For the Christmas spirit...the spirit of Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men...is one of the things we are fighting for... and the traditional symbols mean as much to them as to the rest of us. The army realizes this, and provides the best Christmas dinner it possibly can.

At the same time you're in the kitchen making a savoury stuffing or a Christmas pudding...well-trained army cooks, in England and Australia, Italy and India, are starting to prepare a festive meal. Would you like to know what they're cooking? Here's the Master Menu for Christmas Dinner, 1943-style:

After cream of celery soup with croutons, comes roast turkey with sage dressing and giblet gravy, and a tart cranberry-orange relish. There are three vegetables -- potatoes, creamed corn, and baked squash -- and then a crisp lettuce salad with Russian dressing. Hot rolls fresh from Quartermaster-operated bakeries accompany the main course. For dessert there'll be freshly-baked mince pie or cake, and coffee to drink. And as an extra holiday treat: candy, nuts, and fruit. Sounds almost like the Christmas dinner Grandma used to serve!

The Quartermaster Corps says...regardless of where they are, our men and women will get their Christmas dinner. That's easy enough in an American training camp, and not too difficult at a long-established base overseas...where soldiers file down the line in well-ordered mess halls and sit at long tables, their plates or trays heaped high with all the food at once. But there are many problems in carrying Christmas to the boys in the foxholes. Here's how they'll do it: In a combat area, mobile kitchens are set up as near the front lines as possible, and staffed with well-trained cooks. These cooks prepare the food during the day...under cover of darkness it is carried up to the front lines. In the few isolated areas, the boys' Christmas dinners will be saved for them until they are relieved.

Of course, in some parts of the world the menu will have to be adjusted to what the Quartermaster Corps can get...but there'll always be turkey. In fact, there'll be a full pound of turkey for every man or woman here or overseas. Now you'll understand why you "did without" turkey in the fall months. Under a War Food Administration order, the Armed Forces bought all turkeys on the market between August 2 and October 23. That turkey had to be bought way ahead, so that it could be processed and made ready for shipment in time for holiday dinners all over the world. It'll mean a real taste of home to our men and women in uniform.

The turkey travelled overseas in quick-frozen or canned form. Other parts of the meal made the journey in forms you might not have recognized. In many areas, the soup, the potatoes, and the cranberries will be made of dehydrated foods, and so will the sage dressing. The mess sergeants will use canned corn...and serve it creamed wherever possible. If lettuce is unobtainable, they'll substitute something else. Bakeries have been set up almost everywhere -- even close to the front lines -- and every soldier will have hot rolls and mince pie. In most places they'll also have a bagful of fruit, candy, and nuts.

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The Army will serve cranberry-orange relish as a change from the usual cranberry sauce. Here's the recipe they use in areas where they can get fresh cranberries...it serves a hundred men.

Take 5 pounds of cranberries, 10 oranges, and 5 pounds of sugar. To prepare, put cranberries through food chopper. Wash and quarter whole oranges (including peel), remove seeds, put through chopper, add sugar and mix well with cranberries. Chill in refrigerator a few hours before serving. This relish has a delightful flavor, and also contains more vitamin C than cooked cranberry sauce or jelly.

But Christmas is more than food. At home, you probably have a Christmas tree, or some other Christmas-y decoration. And the same goes for the men in uniform. No matter how far from home they may be, they'll go to great trouble to create the atmosphere of Christmas. The mess hall may be a tent or a real building...but they'll make every effort to decorate it gaily. They may not have a Christmas tree...and often palms or tropical plants will take the place of evergreens or holly...but the effect of Christmas will be there just the same. They'll have the help of the Quartermaster Corps and War Food Administration in providing a festive meal...but they'll produce the real spirit of Christmas through their own efforts.

So while you and your family sit around the Christmas dinner table...think of your absent members with sadness perhaps...but remember that somewhere in the world they are celebrating Christmas too. And while the thought is still in your mind...vow to do all you can so those places will soon be filled again...and peace on earth assured for future Christmases.

